

FOLEY SUPPORTS BUSH ON LITHUANIA

'Delicate' Situation Is Noted
by the House Speaker —
Others Tread Gingerly

By ANDREW ROSENTHAL

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 28 — President Bush won support today from the Speaker of the House for his policy on Lithuania as he confronted lawmakers who have been urging him to take a stronger stand in favor of the Baltic republic's bid for independence.

Despite protests from both sides of the aisle against Soviet actions in Lithuania, members of Congress appeared to be having as much difficulty as the Administration in grappling with the Lithuanian crisis.

Newt Gingrich, the House Republican Whip, said the President had persuaded him to back off from his demands for more aggressive actions by the United States, and many other lawmakers appeared to be treading as carefully as Mr. Bush on the Baltic situation.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee approved a resolution urging Mr. Bush to establish diplomatic relations with "the new government of Lithuania" at "the earliest possible time." But the resolution was only incrementally stronger than a Senate resolution approved last week and weaker than language rejected by the Senate that would have called for immediate recognition of an independent Lithuanian government.

'Very Delicate' Circumstances

The House Speaker, Thomas S. Foley, said the United States intended "to hold President Gorbachev to his promise not to use force." But he said, "I don't criticize the President at this moment in recognizing that circumstances are very delicate, very serious, and I think he should be given the benefit of the doubt as he deals with this."

Mr. Bush discussed the Lithuanian situation in the White House with Republican Congressional leaders. Mr. Gingrich said he told Mr. Bush that he and other legislators wanted him to take more forceful action on Lithuania.

But Mr. Gingrich said he left persuaded by the President that any overt action like the recognition of an independent Lithuanian government could bring the use of military force by President Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

"We had a very spirited exchange and he won," Mr. Gingrich said. Declaring that he was "educated" by the meeting, Mr. Gingrich added, "We don't gain anything by forcing a confrontation."

First Post-Cold-War Crisis

In a speech to the National Press Club today, Senator Daniel Patrick

A Republican says he was 'educated' in a talk with Bush.

Moynihan, Democrat of New York, called the Lithuanian situation "the first crisis of the post-cold war era" and said it would set the tone for superpower relations for many years.

Mr. Moynihan said he opposed immediate recognition for the breakaway government in Vilnius. But he suggested that Mr. Bush could give Mr. Gorbachev political cover by proposing that the World Court in The Hague be asked to settle the issue of whether Lithuania is a legitimate part of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Moynihan said: "Only by holding Mr. Gorbachev to his own professions about international law can we provide him a way out of this situation he finds himself in. The Soviet Union has no claim on Lithuania. It is stolen goods."

The legal process would take several

months and give both sides time to cool off, Mr. Moynihan said in an interview.

"It seems to me that this is an opportunity to do more than simply do nothing," Mr. Moynihan said. "We've set up a very elaborate system of laws and international institutions and if you're not going to use it in this setting, then when are you?"

Bush Meets 4 From House

Mr. Bush also met with four lawmakers who had been sent by Mr. Foley recently to Lithuania and who had vociferously criticized Administration policy on Tuesday — Representatives C. Christopher Cox, Republican of California; Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois; John Miller, Republican of West Virginia, and Bill Sarpalius, Democrat of Texas.

Mr. Cox said the four urged Mr. Bush to take more forceful action on Lithuania, but did not specifically ask him to recognize the Lithuanian government. Administration officials said none of the Republican leaders who met with Mr. Bush made that request.

The mood on Capitol Hill appeared to be mixed. A Republican aide said the Republican leadership has had trouble finding lawmakers willing to publicly

defend Mr. Bush's position on Lithuania.

"For the arch-cold warriors this is vindication of all their suspicions," he said, "and there are those who have viewed things a little less cynically and are concerned that they may have been naïve."

But a Democratic aide said: "There is a real sense of watching and that's why you don't hear more people talking. People are treading very lightly."

The White House, meanwhile, stuck with the more muted position on Lithuania that it took Tuesday when it stopped a steady heightening in the tone of its public statements. But it insisted that it had communicated to Moscow "in the strongest fashion" its opposition to the use of military force and desire for negotiations on Lithuanian independence.

"The President has a responsibility to try to influence events in a responsible way that will produce freedom and a conclusion that is amenable to all parties," said Marlin Fitzwater, the White House spokesman. "We would not try to do something that would only make matters worse or might set back the process in some way."

One Administration official said Washington was looking ahead "with some anxiety" to the weekend, when 8,000 to 10,000 young Lithuanian men will be called up for the military draft.

Lithuanian officials have said they do not consider residents of the republic to be subject to military conscription. But the Moscow Government has already made it clear that it is willing to enforce military service, sending paratroopers into two psychiatric hospitals early Tuesday to arrest Lithuanians who had fled their military posts.